

## THE FEAR OF FAILING, THE NIGHTMARE OF LOSING

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First we all had the fear of falling (Freud, Gesell, Piaget), then the fear of the unfamiliar (Barry Brazelton), then the fear of flying (Erica Jong), & now the fear of failing.

Let's see....how did we get here? By a degeneracy process:

The fear of losing one's soul<sup>1</sup> degenerated into the fear of losing one's integrity<sup>2</sup> & the fear of losing one's body<sup>3</sup>. Then that double paranoia collapsed into the fear of losing<sup>4</sup>.

### Footnotes:

1. While Kant did much to erode the West's historic paradigm, he was sure & defensive of it at certain points, including this: God & the soul share a common fate, you wouldn't have one without the other: theism & personalism stand or fall together. I add history, to produce the trinity of God-&-soul-in-&-beyond-history. Two looks:

(1) The Jesus of Mt. & L. grounds ethics (ie, religiomoral behavior) in, among other things, the fear of losing your being, your essence, yourself (Greek, ψυχή, *psyche*, variously rendered in English according to context--"life," "soul," et al--depending on its referring to this life, actual/potential afterlife, or both; in Philo [some passages] & Mithraism, = πνεῦμα, *pneuma*, spirit). [In biblical Greek & the Hebrew behind it, breathing is the physical base of the metaphors--together with the whole reach of noncognitive supra-/sub-/sensate experiencing (feelings, desires, longing, willing).] Mt. & L. agree: our total being-becoming-continuing are in the hands of God, to whom however we have the power to say yes/no (the presupposition of all preaching, & thus of the Bible itself). Putting oneself (*psyche*-self-life) at God's disposal for Jesus' sake is self-soul-finding (Mt.16<sup>26</sup>, L.9<sup>24</sup>), a better deal than "winning the whole world" (Mt.16<sup>26</sup>). So "be afraid of God, who can destroy both body & soul" (Mt.10<sup>28</sup>, L.12<sup>4</sup>--not of those who "can't kill the soul")....Not far afield is L.'s special sensitivity to women, in Mother Mary's "soul" adoration (1<sup>46</sup>, the Magnificat's first line, "heart" in GNB) & heartbreak (2<sup>35</sup>).

(2) In the currently popular antihistorical resacralization of "nature," theism & personalism, God & the soul (self, person, spirit) tend to fade into Eastern-tinged metaphysics & Western (a) romantic utopianism & (b) antisexist, antipatriarchal liberationism. Anthropologically, "history" (including the Biblical Story) is what the West has contributed to the human adventure. The negative fallout from "history" is, in the eyes of this back-to-nature movement, more & more obscuring its glorious achievements. The God-in-nature model of the God/nature relationship is attacking the God-before/over/beyond model. (Philosophically, the controversy is over the multiple sets relating ontology & epistemology, on the one hand, to continuity & discontinuity on the other.)....What's good about the movement is its concern for global convergence, esp. E/W. Lakota-shaman-&-Christian-catechist Black Elk did this with his vision of Jesus returning riding on the White Buffalo Cow Woman (vision & art being better media for the task, perhaps, than reason & theology--the latter serving their critical & constructive assignments). What's bad is its adolescent antiWesternism reminiscent of our 1960s hippies. Within the Church, most of the leaders are Roman Catholic official celibates--their Church vows having required their being cut off from *natura naturans* in the sexual sense. This "creation spirituality" movement is as sadly antihistorical as "creationism" is antiscientific, but it's more successful in appealing to the higher levels of our culture--esp. when dressed in the self-designation, "theology of ecology." What we need is a thepecology that is honest both to biblical & postbiblical theism & to the central concerns of the ecology movement. We didn't get it from Teilhard, & we're not getting it (as far as I ken) from current creation-spirituality literature (such as the British periodical, CREATION, or the books of Matthew Fox & Thomas Berry, poetically beautiful & profound though are some passages of theirs)....In his highly perceptive & suggestive review of TB's latest, THE DREAM OF THE EARTH [Sierra Club/89], Ken Woodward (5 June 89 NW 70ff) credits TB with intellectual courage in striving toward a fresh numinous caring for the earth. But he rightly points to the

author's romantic neglect of the problem of evil--that we've sinned not only against the environment but against God and our own species, ourselves collectively & individually--"which is why stories of redemption still possess power, even in an ecological age." "It is one thing to rediscover the goodness of creation, quite another to regard the process of evolution as God's primary word to man." TB neglects the ambiguity of nature's message (as well, I add, as history's): "To derive moral standards from the cosmos is to suppose that whatever has evolved is good--or would be, if humankind behaved itself toward other species. But Berry's theory of the self-regulating universe does not take into account the existence of moral evil, despite the evidence in the world around him."...In this creation-spirituality movement, it need hardly need remarking that the bottomline Western-paradigm (Jewish-Greek-Christian) fear of losing one's "soul" is far from view: the idea is lifeless, without sanctional force for religion or for private or public ethics.

2. Our second fear, in this Thinksheet, is the fear of losing one's **integrity**. We're now in what some are calling an ethics epidemic, the populace becoming aware both that "Lying, Cheating, Stealing" (Sam Donaldson's TV hour last night) have become pandemic in America & that a populace without integrity cannot be free ("character" & "democracy" going together--as love & marriage in "Oklahoma"--"like a horse & carriage"). For the first time in our history, yesterday a Speaker of the House resigned under a cloud of ethics charges. The excellent PBS series, "Ethics in America," gave our public a high-quality demo of case-method teaching. The media are slowly, surely becoming convinced of the connection between sex-&-violence "entertainment" & "wilding," gang rapes, juvenile anomic mayhem--& Madison Av. has begun cleaning up its act under public pressures both on the media & on advertisers.

But "integrity" is a culture issue as well as a character issue. As the latter, it denotes moral-ethical wholeness in self & society (negatively put, absence of dissimulation, fraud, "lying, cheating, stealing," hypocrisy, runaway lust-greed). As the former, it denotes motivation-actional wholeness, a paradigm's "set" or system, which in the West includes theism.

IRONY: The media's current attempt to promote "integrity" (ie, "character") lacks cultural integrity; for the media, dominated by the secularistic mentality, has a powerful **tabu against God**. Two instances: (1) While "Ethics in America" was not without benefit of clergy (three clergy, one of each of the main flavors, off & on participating in the segments), it was without benefit of deity, the clergy themselves shying away from speaking of God (ie, using, in any form, the divine sanction--as though there were nothing God wants, or whatever God wants has nothing to do with ethics, or God has no power &/or will vis-a-vis human behavior & destiny). What stronger evidence of how powerful secular sanctions & tabus have become than that even the clergy, who were ordained to speak of & for God, fail to do so "in public," ie beyond the private sphere of their priestcraft & clergy-led institutions? The retort that God is present even when not spoken of-for is a sentimental excuse without substance; so's the devil, but what of it? Contrast Bonhoeffer's speaking for "the bright powers" against "the dark powers," for God against the devil. (2) The Sam Donaldson program I referred to was atheist, ie godless. For the divine sanction that you should avoid lying-cheating-stealing because God is watching he substituted the familial sanction that you should imagine that your parent or your child "is looking over your shoulder." Doubly pathetic: (a) That social sanction assumes a strong family, which ever fewer Americans have; & (b) God's holiness & justice-judgment & love constitute the central moral-ethical sanction in the American heritage that SD was so determined, with his furrowed brow, to honor & restore!

As the religious-constitutive question is **Where's the sacred-holy?** (in God? nature? humanity?), the ethical-constitutive question is **Where's virtue & value?** Ethicist Josephson says America has reversed "It matters not whether you win or lose but how you play the game." Now the virtue is in winning: it's a vice to lose, so whatever you do to avoid losing is virtuous.

3. The third fear is the fear of losing one's **body**, which is all you've got undersecularism. So the current therapeutic cults ("wellness") & fear of cancer.

4. The fear of failing is to self what the fear of losing is to self-in-society. Where your heart is, there is your fear. Having to succeed-win is anomic, anarchic, moving society toward tyranny, the system in which everybody fails & everybody loses.